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Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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Agenda item 4 (e)
Mandated areas: culture

Chairperson's summary

Culture

Member States

1. The Ambassador of Guatemala called for an end to the marginalization of indigenous peoples, and for increased support (including financial) to the Forum and its secretariat to fulfil its broad mandate. He drew attention to the advances made in Guatemala to protect indigenous languages and sacred places and to combat racism against indigenous peoples. He pointed to the results of the peace agreement and the reform of public policy to address the many years of marginalization faced by the indigenous peoples of Guatemala. He emphasized that Guatemala supported both the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples as adopted by the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.[1] The representative of the European Parliament addressed the Forum to underline the importance of cultural diversity and language diversity to the European Union. He also acknowledged that "old Europe" was largely responsible for the plundering of indigenous peoples and their territories during the colonization period and apologized for that historical fact, emphasizing that the European Parliament had allocated 21 million euros in the past three years to fund indigenous initiatives and would continue to support the Forum and indigenous peoples. The policy for indigenous peoples would be a priority under the new Italian presidency of the Parliament. He also noted that the Council and the Parliament wanted to financially support the work of the Forum.

2. The representative of Canada noted that his country's priorities were increased participation of indigenous peoples and the recognition and promotion of cultural diversity. He indicated that a national indigenous language centre would be established in 2004. Canada funded "friendship centres" to assist urban indigenous youth with their cultural connections and growth. Canada also participated in and supported the North American Indigenous Games. The representative also pointed to Canada's support for the work of the Forum. The representative of New Zealand

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emphasized that the revitalization of culture had provided culturally appropriate development for the Maori people. He called for appropriate protection of traditional knowledge and fauna and flora and noted that New Zealand is working towards that goal. He noted furthermore that the repatriation of human remains from European institutions was an important issue and he called on such institutions to return human remains to the Maori people.

United Nations system

3. The representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) described the current relevant work of the organization concerning indigenous peoples. He noted that UNESCO covered various indigenous issues under different departments, including Cultural dialogue, Intangible cultural heritage and Education. He drew attention to the ongoing work of UNESCO in promoting intercultural dialogue, the beginnings of a process to lead to a declaration on intangible cultural heritage and the work being carried out on endangered languages. He also noted in response to questions that language was included under intangible cultural heritage and that the restoration of cultural property was included in programmes within the Heritage section and that UNESCO was developing a relationship with the United Nations Environment Programme to examine the link between cultural diversity and biological diversity.

Indigenous peoples' organizations

4. Some indigenous peoples raised issues concerning water (and the cultural use of water) and called for special support for communities in drought and action against the privatization of water. An indigenous representative from Africa called for democratic policies in Africa that would promote cultural rights and allow indigenous peoples to have control over their resources. Many groups talked about the exclusion of indigenous languages, histories, learning styles and teaching strategies from mainstream education systems and the direct effects on school retention and attainment rates. Recommendations were made to UNESCO to hold a workshop on indigenous languages and to ensure the protection of sacred sites and the revitalization of indigenous cultures. Many indigenous representatives called for the full participation of indigenous peoples in all matters affecting them at the United Nations. The Indigenous Youth Caucus called for the revitalization of indigenous languages. Many representatives called for the protection of traditional knowledge and indigenous intellectual property and the recognition of those collective rights by the United Nations and Member States. Other representatives drew attention to the loss of territories, plants and animals that were vital for the protection and continuation of indigenous cultures and called for the interconnectedness of all those things to be recognized, respected and protected. Many representatives agreed that the issues of land and waters, as well as natural resources that were essential for the practising of indigenous cultures, remained unresolved with nation States and within the United Nations. A representative of the World Festival of Traditional Games and Sports discussed that international gathering, which would be held in Montreal, Canada, in 2004.

Forum members

5. Ms. Njuma emphasized the importance of the preservation of ancestral (traditional) knowledge. Mr. Littlechild applauded the inclusion and promotion of

sport within health, culture and education. Mr. Tamang welcomes the UNESCO initiatives to promote intercultural dialogue with indigenous peoples, to promote sacred site protection and the work towards the protection of intangible cultural heritage. He requested advice on ways the Forum and UNESCO could best work together to promote the mandated areas of the Forum. Mr. Kouevi noted the need for UNESCO and the United Nations Children's Fund to work together and also to work in a coordinated fashion with the Permanent Forum. Mr. Choquehuanca called for the return of stolen artefacts and human remains from museums and an end to the illegal trade in those sacred objects. Ms. Lux de Coti noted the importance of the full participation of indigenous peoples in all the relevant work of the specialized agencies, particularly the work of UNESCO concerning languages and intangible cultural heritage. Ms. Qin encouraged the promotion of access to appropriate education and the use of bilingual strategies. Ms. Nicolaisen called for an end to the trafficking of artefacts and sacred objects and noted that sacred sites were the focal points for the spiritual life of indigenous peoples. The work of UNESCO in protecting sacred sites was noted.

Notes

[1] E/CN.4/Sub.2/1994/2/Add.1.